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TAGS: [TBIO](#) [KSTH](#) [KFLU](#) [ECON](#) [PREL](#) [WHO](#) [EG](#)
SUBJECT: EGYPT: UPDATE ON RECENT HUMAN AVIAN INFLUENZA CASES

REF: A) 2006 CAIRO 7249 B) 2006 CAIRO 6326

11. (SBU) Summary. Scientists at NAMRU-3 conducted a detailed examination of the H5N1 avian influenza virus responsible for the deaths of three family members in late December in the Gharbiya governorate (ref A). Early results show that the virus has undergone mutations and acquired some characteristics of mammalian strains. All of these mutations have been seen before in swine or humans in other countries. Though this is not/not a pandemic influenza virus and scientists cannot say that these mutations are a step towards creation of a pandemic virus, the changing face of avian influenza in Egypt requires careful monitoring. NAMRU-3 continues to collaborate closely with GOE officials to survey the virus in humans and the bird population. End Summary.

MIXING AND RECOMBINATION IN EGYPT

12. (SBU) Specimens from the most recent deaths suggest that Egypt could be acting as a type of mixing bowl for diverse strains of H5N1 originating from thousands of miles away. The virus obtained from the thirty-nine year old Gharbiya woman who succumbed to H5N1 in October (ref B) showed a mutation not previously seen in Egypt. Two of the three December cases in Gharbiya sequenced by NAMRU-3 showed that same mutation, as well as two additional mutations. One of these mutations is identical to another discovered in Mongolia in 2005, which is on the migratory flyway with Egypt. Crossed by two major flyways, millions of wild birds pass through Egypt each autumn and spring, migrating between Africa and Central Asia.

THE CHANGING FACE OF AVIAN INFLUENZA

13. (SBU) According to officials at NAMRU-3, sequencing of the October and December cases shows that the virus is acquiring changes which make it look more like a mammalian virus. All three recent mutations have been seen before in swine or humans in other countries. Though this is not/not a pandemic virus and scientists cannot say that these mutations are a step towards creation of a pandemic virus, the fact that a single virus has acquired three mutations in three months is cause for careful monitoring. The virus' ability to acquire mammalian characteristics rapidly, in regions of the viral genome that determine its infectivity, needs to be carefully evaluated. In the most recent cases, there is no evidence that the virus is efficiently transmitted from

person to person.

MISSION RESPONSE

14. (SBU) NAMRU-3 representatives are keeping officials from the Ministry of Health and Population (MOHP), CDC, DOD surveillance teams, and WHO in Geneva of the test results. NAMRU-3 also submitted the virus sequences to Genbank, a NIH genetic sequence databank; they will be accessible to the public in a few days on their web site. There is a high likelihood that both the press and scientific community will speculate about the meaning of the mutations. NAMRU is in the process of sequencing the remainder of the viral genome in all of these cases. In collaboration with Ministry of Environment (MOE), NAMRU is continuing surveillance of wild bird populations to detect any new viral strains entering Egypt.
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